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International policing in Russia: Police cooperation between the European member states and the Russian Federation

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published in

Policing and Society
2007

DOI (link to publisher)

[10.1080/10439460701717957](https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460701717957)

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in VU Research Portal](#)

citation for published version (APA)

Block, L. (2007). International policing in Russia: Police cooperation between the European member states and the Russian Federation. *Policing and Society*, 17(4), 367-387. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460701717957>

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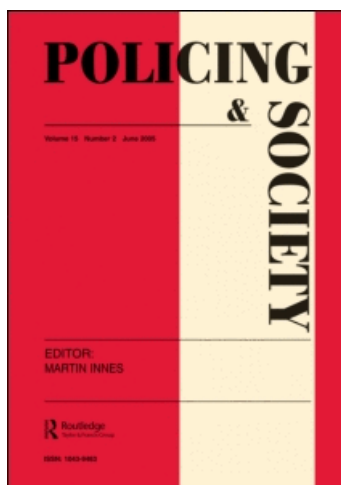
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Policing and Society

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713646669>

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To cite this Article Block, Ludo(2007) 'International Policing in Russia: Police Co-operation Between the European Union Member States and the Russian Federation', Policing and Society, 17: 4, 367 — 387

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10439460701717957

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10439460701717957>

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International Policing in Russia: Police Co-operation Between the European Union Member States and the Russian Federation

Ludo Block

In this article, contemporary practices of police co-operation between the (Member States of the) European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (RF) are considered. Starting with a depiction of EU-RF police co-operation through Interpol and Europol, the article continues with specific attention to the role of police liaison officers and the daily practice of operational police co-operation on behalf of the EU Member States. Relevant Russian law enforcement agencies are discussed, as well as obstacles to co-operation. Concurrently, two EU policy instruments possibly of influence on EU-RF police co-operation are closely examined. Findings indicate that EU-RF police co-operation is predominantly bilateral in nature without any incentive for change. Interpol plays an important role in this field, while as yet Europol does not. Furthermore, the impression emerges that in daily practice EU policy instruments show insufficient understanding of police reality, and are of little relevance to EU-RF police co-operation.

Keywords: *International police co-operation; Interpol; Europol; Liaison officer; European Union; Russian Federation*

Introduction

Although increasing academic attention is given to international police co-operation, little research is carried out on how operational police co-operation actually operates (Fijnaut, 2004). Notwithstanding available significant research in this area (e.g., Deflem, 2002; Den Boer, 2002; Nadelmann, 1993; Santiago, 2000; Sheptycki, 2002), the picture of operational police co-operation is far from complete, and lacks both

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ISSN 1043-9463 (print)/ISSN 1477-2728 (online) © 2007 Taylor & Francis

DOI: 10.1080/10439460701717957

overview and insight. In this article, the practices involved in international co-operation between the European Union (EU) and the Russian Federation (RF) are considered.¹

There are two reasons that make studying the particular EU-RF area of international police co-operation relevant. First, the RF is the biggest single neighbour of the EU, and therefore an important partner in issues of economy and security. The “Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation” between the EU and the RF² establishes the institutional framework for EU-RF relations, and consists of a specific Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) section. Moreover, as Fijnaut (2004) notes, compared to other third countries, JHA co-operation plays an important role in the overall policy of the EU towards the RF. Second, during the 1990s, Russian organised crime was perceived as an emerging threat to Western security (Williams, 1997), giving a considerable impetus to police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF. The contemporary practices of international police co-operation that have resulted, will be described in this article, with the primary aim of expanding the empirical knowledge of this subject.

The article begins by reviewing the nature of co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF through the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) and the European Police Office (Europol). Following this, attention is given to direct bilateral co-operation, while focusing predominantly on the role and tasks of the law enforcement liaison officers stationed by various EU Member States in the RF. The sections thereafter will address the Russian law enforcement agencies that actively engage in international co-operation, as well as the obstacles to co-operating with those agencies. Then the article outlines the existence and implications of EU policy instruments relevant for operational police co-operation in this specific area. Finally, some concluding remarks are made.

Framework

Koers (2001) distinguishes a tripartite distinction in forms of international police co-operation; technical assistance; prevention and upholding public order; and criminal investigations. Providing technical assistance varies from offering information and training on police practices and techniques, to the actual donation of equipment or direct financial aid. It is often seen as a first step towards future co-operation in other fields, as during this co-operation personal networks and trust, both indispensable for close co-operation, can be built up.³ Co-operation in upholding public order will most often be seen between neighbouring countries in regional cross-border policing and when events, such as football tournaments, have instant cross-border effects. The most established, and referred to form of international police co-operation is the co-operation in the field of criminal investigations, entailing exchange of police information and requests for investigative actions. The latter form is the main focus of this article.

In addition to different forms of co-operation, different levels of co-operation can also be identified in relation to police co-operation. Benyon et al. (1993) distinguish three inter-related levels, a macro-, meso- and micro-level of international police co-operation. The macro-level applies to constitutional and international legal arrangements and initiatives and—particularly within the EU—the harmonisation of national laws and regulations. This is the governmental level at which fundamental issues, such as procedures for extradition and assistance in criminal matters, are resolved. Co-operative arrangements on this level are usually treaties and conventions with judicial impact, and are often subject to parliamentary ratification. The Schengen agreement of 1990 is an example of police co-operation at this level.

The meso-level is concerned with the structural and procedural frameworks in which operational policing occurs. The arrangements on this level are supposed to directly facilitate operational police co-operation and do not need intergovernmental agreements and parliamentary ratification. Although co-operation on this level sometimes occurs as a result of political initiatives, more regularly it takes place between different law enforcement organisations, sometimes without the knowledge or sanction of governments (Benyon, 1997: 108). An important feature of meso-level co-operation is periodic communication, such as working groups that include face-to-face contact between middle-ranking officers from different countries. Also, setting up information systems, common databases, and co-ordination of and access to information, such as criminal intelligence, are important factors on the meso-level.

The micro-level involves the co-operation in the investigation of specific offences and the prevention and control of particular forms of crime, in other words, day-to-day operational police co-operation. This can occur on an ad-hoc basis, though, especially in the EU, co-operation on this level is increasingly based on existing macro- and meso-level arrangements, like the Schengen Agreement and co-operation through Europol. In direct bilateral co-operation of this kind, the use of liaison officers, who are posted from one country to work with their counterparts in another country, is frequently seen as an effective instrument (Bigo, 2000).

Between all three levels, a symbiotic relationship often exists and therefore, although this article will predominantly focus on micro-level co-operation, macro- and meso-level aspects of co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF will also be discussed.

Interpol

The International Criminal Police Organisation, which is the formal name of Interpol, is the oldest structure facilitating international police co-operation in the world. Originally formed in 1923 and given its present name in 1956, the organisation has steadily grown in membership, but has never substantially changed in form or objectives (Deflem, 2002). Interpol is, in fact, a non-governmental organisation based on the self-organisation of police forces around the world without any direct government influence.⁴ Operating as a global channel for peer-to-peer

police communication, in 2004 Interpol had a total of 182 participating member countries that in total sent over 6.7 million messages to each other that year.⁵ Every participating country maintains a so-called National Central Bureau Interpol (NCB), staffed with its own law enforcement personnel, from where communication through the Interpol channels takes place. These NCBs form the gateways between the national law enforcement forces and the Interpol communication channel. The core business of Interpol, facilitating information exchange on a case-by-case basis, is usually characterised as police co-operation at the micro-level (Benyon, 1997). In the last few years, Interpol has, however, increasingly developed its other functions, i.e., providing a range of criminal databases—currently a total of seven global police databases can be searched directly from each NCB—and analytical services, as well as proactive support for police operations throughout the world. These indicate a further expansion of Interpol's activities into meso-level police co-operation, of which its regional and functional conferences and working groups are already known examples.

Interpol not only has its origin in Europe,⁶ but also is at present still of high importance for police co-operation in Europe. The European region of Interpol,⁷ which consist of 46 States and includes the EU Member States as well as the RF, accounts for 64 per cent of the message traffic passing through the organisation each year.⁸ The “Interpol channel” as such is mentioned in various treaties of the Council of Europe and in the Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters between the Member States of the European Union (OJ C197 12-07-2000) as an official channel for sending requests, especially in cases of urgency.⁹ A co-operation agreement between Interpol and Europol was signed in 2001, Interpol is regularly represented at the Heads of Europol National Units meetings,¹⁰ and, moreover, the EU supported Interpol in 2003 to upgrade facilities at NCBs in five Balkan countries. These examples show the significance that the Council of Europe, the EU and their Member States attribute to Interpol. Therefore, even though the organisation has primarily a global mission, without doubt Interpol plays a crucial role in police co-operation in the EU and the European region on the micro-level, and increasingly on the meso-level as well. Consequently, Interpol's importance in police co-operation between EU Member States and the RF is beyond question.

Police co-operation with the RF through Interpol channels is nonetheless a rather recent phenomenon, as the police of the former Soviet Union did not take part in Interpol. In April 1990, almost at the end of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Council of Ministers agreed on applying for membership of Interpol, which was granted at the 59th General Assembly of Interpol in Ottawa in September 1990. In January 1991, the NCB Moscow started to operate, first as NCB of the Soviet Union, but after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in August 1991, as the NCB of the largest succession state, the RF (Ovchinskiy, 2000).

This arrangement lasted until 1996 when membership by the RF of Interpol was formalised in the RF by a Presidential decree and elaborated in a government resolution, whereby the details of the organisation and functioning of the NCB

Moscow were determined.¹¹ The NCB Moscow is formally a part of the staff apparatus of the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation (MVD). Its tasks are “to provide effective international information exchange on criminal acts”, “to render assistance in executing requests of international law enforcement organisations and law enforcement organs of foreign countries” and “observation of the execution of international agreements on matters regarding combating crime, in which the RF is a participant”. This entails more than being a “gateway” for information, and is elaborated in the defined functions for the NCB Moscow that include:

- receiving, handling and sending to the General Secretariat of Interpol and to foreign NCBs, requests, investigative instructions and other messages of law enforcement and other government organs of the Russian Federation;
- taking measures for the timely and necessary execution of requests of law enforcement and other government organs of the Russian Federation;
- arranging the execution on the territory of the Russian Federation of requests received from foreign NCBs and sending these to the competent law enforcement or other government organs of the Russian Federation;
- supervising the execution of foreign requests.¹²

The NCB Moscow is located in the building of the MVD Information Centre in the southwest of Moscow, and has a staff of approximately 60 police officers. In contrast to most EU Member States, where the NCB staff consists mainly of administrative personnel, they have police ranks, full police powers and are allowed to carry firearms. The NCB Moscow handles between 35,000 and 40,000 messages yearly in approximately 4,000 different cases,¹³ of which the great majority (70–80 per cent) concern the European region of Interpol.

Apart from the databases filled with information from Interpol messages and cases that have passed through their office in the last decade, the NCB Moscow does not maintain any other independent databases. Most of the information needed to answer foreign requests should be received from the central police departments in Moscow or from one of the eighty-nine regional police departments throughout Russia. Through the internal MVD electronic network, the NCB has access to some central police databases (such as issued passport numbers and criminal records) and is linked to the Moscow police force network (Ovchinskiy, 2000). In order to obtain information from the regional police departments, the NCB Moscow maintains seventy subordinated regional field offices throughout the RF.¹⁴ These field offices collect the requested information in the region and send it to Moscow. Although every field office is supposed to be connected to the RF-wide MVD network with an email facility (Ovchinskiy, 2000), until recently the information exchange between most field offices and the NCB Moscow was conducted by surface mail, often causing long response times.

In sum, the NCB Moscow performs a key role in EU-RF police co-operation at the micro-level. It is the gateway for foreign law enforcement agencies seeking information from the RF, and is largely occupied with European cases. As we will

see later, the NCB Moscow also plays a significant part in direct bilateral police co-operation in combating organised crime between the EU Member States and the RF.

Europol

“Why do we need Europol if we already have Interpol?” This remark, made by a Russian MVD general in 1999 while in Moscow at a presentation to mark the start of Europol, shows the attitude toward Europol in the RF at that time.¹⁵ Four years later in Rome, a strategic agreement between Europol and the RF was signed.¹⁶

Europol, established in its current form in 1999, is the European Union law enforcement organisation that handles criminal intelligence, but does not have executive powers. Its aim is to improve the effectiveness and co-operation between the competent authorities of the Member States in preventing and combating serious international organised crime.¹⁷ Europol facilitates the exchange of information and intelligence between the EU Member States through the Europol Liaison Officers, which are seconded by the Member States as representatives of their national law enforcement agencies. They exchange information while sometimes literally sitting together in one room in the Europol building in The Hague.

In addition, Europol generates strategic reports (e.g., threat assessments) and crime analysis on the basis of information and intelligence supplied by Member States or gathered from other sources. Furthermore, it provides operational analysis, technical support and expertise on request from the Member States, although its main function remains that of a “clearing house for information” (Fijnaut, 2004: 250).

Europol is only allowed to exchange personal data with third parties, i.e., non-EU Member States, if an agreement regulating this has been reached with that third party.¹⁸ In 2000, the Council of the European Union authorised the director of Europol to enter negotiations with third parties for such agreements,¹⁹ and since then seven strategic agreements and twelve operational agreements with third parties were concluded.²⁰ The Europol press-briefing on the agreement between Europol and the RF stated:

The new agreement permits Law Enforcement Authorities of the Russian Federation and Europol to exchange strategic and technical information of mutual interest in combating serious forms of organized crime such as drugs trafficking, illegal immigration, trafficking in human beings, money laundering and terrorism. In a second step the agreement shall be extended to include operational and investigation related cooperation.²¹

This agreement, in which a strategic framework has been laid (with the possibility to facilitate operational data exchange in the future), can be regarded as a first step in police co-operation between the EU—as a whole—and the RF at a macro-level of police co-operation.

For the moment, however, the importance of this agreement for operational police co-operation between the EU and the RF should not be overstated. The agreement

does not provide any provision for the exchange of operational data, so actual operational police co-operation between Europol and the RF is not yet possible. Second, as a former superpower, the RF acknowledges the political relevance of such agreements, whilst the observance of this agreement appears to have less priority. More than a year after concluding the agreement, no designated central contact point for Europol has been appointed.²²

Meanwhile, some serious obstacles for effective operational co-operation exist on both sides. In the EU, the supply of information from national police agencies to Europol, and its role in police co-operation is still regarded as insufficient.²³ Moreover, the frequent political turmoil surrounding Europol (recently regarding the fulfilment of the director's position²⁴), does not contribute to building a reputation as an effective and trustworthy partner. The Russian side seems to be aware of these difficulties,²⁵ however has no central focal point representing all law enforcement agencies either. Although the annex to the agreement lists five competent law enforcement authorities in the RF, all contacts with Europol, however, seem to be dominated by the MVD. It is unlikely that the MVD can genuinely represent the other law enforcement agencies, as will be elaborated later in this article. In summary, police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF through Europol, for the moment, is only cautiously being shaped at the macro-level, whilst active micro-level co-operation through Europol appears to be unlikely in the near future.

Bilateral Co-operation: A Key Role for Liaison Officers

Direct bilateral contacts, sometimes referred to as "horizontal" police contacts, both formal and informal, still form the backbone of police co-operation in Europe (Benyon, 1993; Den Boer, 2002; Santiago, 2000). Informal networks of personal contacts are often seen as crucial in this respect (Bigo, 1996; Sheptycki, 2002; van Reenen, 1989), although it takes time to develop a level of trust adequate for co-operation (Anderson, 2002). At the present time, such networks between the law enforcement agencies of RF and the EU Member States to a large extent only exist between the RF and those neighbouring EU Member States, which, possibly with the exception of Finland, used to be part of the former East Bloc.²⁶ Furthermore, a considerable language barrier impedes the forming of informal networks between the EU Member States and the RF, all together resulting, as yet, in the limited relevance of this channel for EU-RF police co-operation.

Over the last decade, however, another channel for direct bilateral co-operation emerged as a result of stationing EU Member States' liaison officers in the RF. With respect to liaison officers in Europe, Bigo (2000) argues that they are the human interface between the various national police forces and their role is, "crucial for policing in Europe, because it is they who manage the flow of information between their respective agencies" (Bigo, 2000: 67). For bilateral police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF, liaison officers seem to fulfil a similar significant role and their number has risen significantly in the last decade. Whereas in 1999 a

total of fifteen liaison officers, representing seven EU Member States, were stationed in the RF, in 2004 this number has risen to thirty-one representing sixteen EU Member States.²⁷ At the present time, they form the majority of foreign law enforcement representation in the RF.²⁸

Table I shows the number of liaison officers from 1992 to 2004.²⁹ The substantial growth from 1998 can, in part, be attributed to EU Member States deciding to station a first liaison, which includes those liaison officers that since the enlargement of the EU in May 2004 are regarded as EU Member States liaisons.³⁰ The other part of the growth can be contributed to the increase in the number of liaison officers per Member state, now varying from one to seven liaison officers for an individual country. Some 75 per cent of the liaison officers are stationed in Moscow, and for obvious reasons, Estonia, Finland and Sweden have liaison officers present in St. Petersburg, while Norway has a liaison officer in Murmansk. Almost all liaison officers have one or more local support staff, totalling more than fifty persons dealing full time with law enforcement co-operation on behalf of EU Member States in the RF.³¹

Daily Practice

All EU Member States' liaison officers more or less perform the same ambiguous role, as described by Nadelmann (1993), of both official representative on behalf of their agency as well as that of a fixer, i.e., a facilitator of requests from and to their home country for information, evidence, interrogations, searches, arrests and extraditions.³² There is, nonetheless, considerable variation in the background, competence, working area and exact tasks of the liaison officers in the RF. Twenty-four are police officers, most with an operational background in investigative work, five liaison officers have an operational customs background and two have a border guard background. In most cases, police liaison officers deal with "police" requests, and customs liaison officers deal with "customs" requests. When it comes to combating

Table I Total number of EU Member States' law enforcement liaison officers stationed in the RF

1992	1
1993	4
1994	5
1995	9
1996	10
1997	12
1998	13
1999	15
2000	15
2001	16
2002	22
2003	25
2004	31

international drug and arms trafficking, the division is less obvious and some liaison officers are competent in both customs and police matters.³³ Regarding the working area of the liaison officers, some only cover the RF, others cover the whole former Soviet Union or parts of it.

The average liaison officers' daily tasks consist mainly of information exchange with Russian law enforcement, but also include assistance with judicial co-operation, such as preparation and supporting the executing of *commissions rogatoire*, assistance with extraditions, and non-operational technical co-operation like training and exchange of knowledge.³⁴ Furthermore, several liaison officers fulfil (supporting) tasks in immigration and visa matters in their respective embassies.

The main priority of the liaison officers is dealing with requests originating from their respective country to the RF, and some are even expected by their agency to deal only with those and not with requests brought up by their co-operating counterparts in Russia. At first sight, and especially from a governance perspective, such a policy is understandable—it is after all expensive to maintain a liaison network abroad.

Then again, from an operational perspective, there are at least two solid reasons that encourage liaison officers to deal also with requests brought up by the Russian agencies. First and foremost is cultivating reciprocity. In practice it is not possible for a liaison officer to bring only questions to his counterparts and never answers. To some extent, reciprocity can be offered by providing technical assistance and sending Russian colleagues to training courses and on other trips abroad. In the end, however, both parties need their investigative successes, and, therefore, maintaining a reciprocal “exchange of information” relation is crucial for a liaison officer. The second reason stems from an intelligence point of view. Every request for information inherently contains information on possible criminal activities, criminal structures and involved persons. This could shed light on security threats in the liaison officers' country that otherwise might have escaped the focus of the judiciary. In practice, therefore, one will see all liaison officers to a certain extent deal with cases originating from their own country as well as from the RF.

Commonly, the liaison officers handle those cases that, mostly because of complexity, sensitivity or urgency, need more active support than a simple information exchange that could pass through Interpol channels or—in case of a customs investigation—through direct contacts between customs authorities. However, the need to maintain reciprocal relations with several actors both in the RF and in their home country, results in less complex cases handled by the liaison officers as well, mainly to build up “credit”.

In total, EU Member States' liaison officers in Moscow handle about 4000 cases a year,³⁵ with the actual number varying between 60 and 500 cases per Member State. There is, as with many other concepts regarding operational police co-operation, no shared definition of a “case”.³⁶ Placing too much emphasis on this number could therefore be tricky. Nevertheless, it represents a fairly large part of the bilateral operational workload and supports the earlier presented assumption that liaison

officers play a key role in the micro-level police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF.

On the meso-level of police co-operation, several bilateral initiatives exist, like the Finno-Russian Border guard working group,³⁷ and the German-Russian working group on organised crime.³⁸ The best known meso-level co-operation initiative, in which several EU Member States as well as the RF participate, appears to be the multilateral Baltic Sea Task Force on Organised crime,³⁹ which is often mentioned as “best practice” in this area. The aim of the task force, which is a clear example of a meso-level initiative, is to “strengthen the ability to prevent and combat organised crime by setting up a close co-operation between law enforcement agencies in each country based on existing structures”.

Looking at the macro-level, it shows that all EU Member States with a liaison officer posted in the RF have concluded one or more bilateral agreement(s) on law enforcement co-operation with the authorities of the RF. These agreements differ both in level—interagency versus intergovernmental—and in content, such as regulating technical assistance, exchange of information, placement of liaison officers or combinations of these. All together, a web of bilateral macro-level co-operation arrangements exists, all expressing the intention to co-operate, but not all with the same relevance for day-to-day operational co-operation. Multilaterally only the series of Conventions regarding legal co-operation in criminal matters from the Council of Europe cover several formal aspects.⁴⁰ Since 1996, the RF has signed and ratified four Conventions—and some additional protocols—of the Council of Europe concerning legal co-operation in criminal matters. These conventions, which entered into force in the RF between March 2000 and December 2001,⁴¹ predominantly regulate judicial co-operation. However, in practice—partly due to differences in legal systems—both judicial and police co-operation are often entangled to a large extent (Fijnaut, 2004) and, therefore, these Council of Europe Conventions have relevance for the EU-RF police co-operation.

Russian Law Enforcement Agencies

There are four law enforcement agencies in the RF that, on a regular basis, engage in international law enforcement co-operation with their European counterparts. These are the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Federal Security Service (FSB), the State Customs Committee (GTK) and the State Anti Drug Committee (SADC). Another important co-operation partner for the European law enforcement agencies is the General Prosecutor's Office (GPO).

The police in the RF are organised in the MVD in both functional and geographical departments. All of the eight-nine Russian regions have a Main Department of Internal Affairs (GUVD), which can be described as a (partly) independent regional police force with all basic police functions organised within the structure. Next to these geographical departments, the MVD has several functional police departments on a federal level, such as the Main Department for Combating Organised Crime

(GUBOP) and the Federal Service for Combating Economic and Tax Crimes (FSENP).

The MVD does have a central international co-operation department, however, virtually no operational co-operation takes place through this department, as it mainly performs a role in logistic and protocol arrangements. Most regional and functional departments have a separate international co-operation unit within their structures. Some officers from operational units, such as the operational investigative bureau for combating drugs inside the GUBOP and the Moscow Police Criminal Investigations Department (MUR), have direct contacts with the EU Member States liaison officers.

In this respect, the NCB Moscow is worth mentioning, as it also functions as an important counterpart for the Member States' liaison officers—next to dealing with requests received through Interpol channels. Besides facilitating operational information exchange, the NCB assists in contacting various departments in the MVD or other law enforcement agencies, with receiving delegations and carrying out extraditions. Requests made by the liaison officers normally get a high priority within the NCB Moscow, and even though it has to get its information elsewhere, the NCB is one of the most frequently contacted law enforcement counterparts by the EU Member States' liaison officers.

The FSB, heir of the illustrious KGB, has broad law enforcement functions, including fighting (organised) crime and drug trafficking, in addition to its main responsibilities of security, counterintelligence, and counterterrorism.⁴² Also, the Federal Border Guard is nowadays again,⁴³ part of the FSB structure. Having, contrary to most European security services, full powers of criminal investigation, makes the FSB an important partner for the liaison officers. Their international co-operation department handles all daily operational co-operation, normally the liaison officers do not meet the FSB case officers, unless in long term ongoing complicated cases or due to a specific request. Opinions about the co-operativeness of the FSB differ. In general, it can be said that if there is a common interest for both the FSB and a foreign partner, their co-operation is likely to be swift and professional. The activities of the FSB are, however, subordinate to foreign policy and national security, even when co-operating in criminal matters.

For the EU Member States' liaison officers who are mainly occupied with customs cases, the GTK is the most frequently contacted co-operation partner. In some matters, there is an overlap between what could be classified as an "administrative (customs) case" or a "criminal (police) case". This also makes the police liaison officers often contact the GTK, commonly in cases of drug trafficking and cigarette smuggling.

The formation of the 40,000 employees strong SADC in 2003 appears to have been mostly of a political nature, in contrast to the official explanation that a new organisation was needed to effectively combat drug trafficking in the RF.⁴⁴ The operational capabilities and thus the effectiveness as co-operation partner of the SADC are still unclear for the liaison officers, though the good personal contacts of

several SADC international department employees result in regular interactions between the SADC and the EU Member States' liaison officers.

For judicial co-operation, the EU Member States' liaison officers co-operate frequently with the GPO through which the majority of the formal requests for legal assistance have to pass before these can be executed. Although handling such formal requests is normally qualified as judicial co-operation compared to police co-operation (Koers, 2001), a large number of the EU Member States' liaison officers are engaged in handling these formal requests as well. Given that judicial co-operation is often the formal follow-up of successful, operational police co-operation, this makes perfect sense. Generally in the RF, formal requests for legal assistance should be executed by prosecutors and investigators of the prosecution service.⁴⁵ If the execution of the request can take place without coercive means for which an order of a prosecutor is needed,⁴⁶ an investigator from one of the investigative committees attached to the law enforcement agencies can handle the request.

This brief sketch of the Russian law enforcement agencies that frequently engage in international co-operation with the EU Member States' liaison officers shows that it is difficult to point out one agency that can reasonably act as a central point representing all Russian law enforcement agencies. Moreover, overlapping competences and fierce competition between the law enforcement agencies in the RF result in very limited interagency co-operation and sharing of information. This is one of the obstacles in bilateral co-operation that will be elaborated in the following section.

Obstacles to Bilateral Co-operation

Obstacles that are met by EU Member States' liaison officers in bilateral operational police co-operation with their RF counterparts can roughly be divided into four categories. The first is organisational obstacles. Most often mentioned by the liaison officers is the rampant bureaucracy (and accompanying strict hierarchy) in the law enforcement agencies, resulting in long response times. In very urgent cases, and on the basis of personal relationships with the right persons, swift action can take place, although these remain an exception. Another obstacle in this category is the strong competition that exists between the law enforcement agencies and their profound mutual distrust, especially between the MVD and the FSB (Kaliyev, 2002). In the field of combating drug trafficking, where all four agencies are competent, interagency co-operation only seems to work if based on personal contacts.⁴⁷ Finally in this category, the lack of funding of the Russian law enforcement agencies can be mentioned as a factor that obstructs swift and efficient co-operation.

The second category of obstacles for police co-operation is widespread corruption. Corruption in Russian society has been omnipresent in the last hundred years (Brovkin, 2003) and structural corruption inside the Russian law enforcement agencies has been widely documented.⁴⁸ Although not every Russian law enforcement officer is corrupt,⁴⁹ one can reasonably expect corrupt officers in every department.

This severely limits the trust that can be placed by the liaison officers in their counterparts, and, thus, hampers the co-operation.

The political dependency of law enforcement agencies as well as its political functions, although apparently less than under the communist party of the Soviet Union, are still present (Shelley, 1996), and cause the third set of obstacles. This category has three commonly recognisable manifestations. First, if a new Minister or head of a law enforcement agency is appointed, trusted partners of the new leadership replace soon after almost all department chiefs. Although this situation became more stable recently, it still forces the liaison officers to frequently rebuild their network on that level. Second, law enforcement agencies are frequently used as political tools in targeting those out of political grace.⁵⁰ Not complying with a request for co-operation in such cases from the RF, even when the so-called “criminal case” is clearly politically motivated, can seriously endanger the liaison officers’ working relations, and even affect the overall political relations between the RF and the liaison officers’ country.⁵¹ Finally, persons that are part of the ruling class or have their support appear to enjoy relative impunity—attempts to obtain information about or assistance in investigating these persons are futile.

The final set of obstacles concern differences in (legal) culture and language as identified in other research as well (e.g., Den Boer, 2002; Tak, 2000). Examples are the lack of command of foreign languages on both sides, different ways of organising and prioritising investigations, differences in legal systems, and last but not least, unfamiliarity on both sides with relevant differences.

EU Justice and Home Affairs Instruments in Practice

A variety of regulatory JHA instruments, e.g., action plans, decisions, acts and recommendations, from the Council of the European Union have been released in the last few years. Looking at the content, two of these could be directly relevant for police co-operation between EU Member States and the RF.

The first instrument is the “European Union Action Plan on common action for the Russian Federation on combating organised crime”.⁵² This plan is “... designed to promote close co-operation between the European Union and its Member States, and the Russian Federation in the fight against organized crime”. It describes preferable action in the fields of judicial co-operation, law enforcement co-operation, and co-operation in other forums. On the subject of law enforcement co-operation, the plan sums up seventeen possible arrangements.

Amongst others it is noted that “special attention can be devoted by the Russian Federation law enforcement authorities to priority issues”, “technical, operational and strategic information and intelligence can be exchanged”, “central Russian Federation contact points will be identified”, and the development of “common principles as appropriate” is endorsed. Also, it is mentioned that “training courses will be held with Russian Federation law enforcement personnel to develop good practice in the field of international cooperation”. Furthermore, a special paragraph is devoted to the

Member States' liaison officers in the RF which lays down that "these officers [should] meet on a regular basis", "exchange relevant information" and "should have the opportunity to consider the implementation of the action plan and to put forward proposals for strengthening that process".

Noteworthy is the absence of concrete goals, timeframes, available budgets or defined responsible actors for the actions mentioned in the Action Plan, as well as the careful avoidance of sensitive points in regard to inefficient organisational practices and corruption in the RF law enforcement agencies. In practice, since 1999 the only identifiable consistent action⁵³ taken based upon the plan, has been the organisation of meetings for the EU liaison officers by (almost) every presiding EU Member State. The added value of these meetings, which habitually look like a typical Brussels' session with pre-drafted conclusions supporting national priorities of the presiding EU Member State, is less apparent. Since 2000, EU Member States' liaison officers have put forward several proposals for tangible action as recommended in the action plan, though these are stranded in bureaucracy. In this context, the Finnish Minister of the Interior noted that "... the practical implementation of this program has perhaps been too much based on the actions of the EU police liaison officers in Moscow".⁵⁴

The liaison meetings, as suggested in the action plan "to promote information exchange", were in place before the action plan was drafted and have continued since. During these bi-monthly informal meetings, several technical and strategic items are discussed between all—and not only EU—law enforcement liaison officers posted in Moscow. However, operational information is not exchanged during these meetings, which is not surprising given the unlikelihood of sensitive operational information exchange in any multilateral setting (Lefebvre, 2003). Liaison officers do sometimes exchange operational information bilaterally en marge of the meetings, nevertheless this has no relation with the determined goal and/or significance of these meetings.

The second EU instrument possibly of influence to EU-RF police co-operation, is the "Council Decision on the common use of liaison officers posted in third countries by the law enforcement agencies of the Member States".⁵⁵ This Decision aims at "strengthening cooperation on the posting of liaison officers to third countries and international organisations in order to combat serious forms of cross-border crime more effectively" and replaces the 1996 Joint Action on the same subject.⁵⁶ According to Article 2 of the Decision, the Member States are to ensure that their liaison officers "establish and maintain direct contacts with competent authorities in the host State", "contribute to the collection and exchange of information which may be used to combat serious cross-border crime" and "carry out their tasks within the framework of their responsibilities and in compliance with the provisions, laid down in their national laws and in any agreements concluded with host States or international organisations". Other provisions instruct the liaison officers to "meet regularly to exchange relevant information", "work together to improve relations with the host State", "share tasks among themselves", "look after the interests of one or more other Member States" and "participate in joint seminars on crime trends". Also Member

States that do not have a liaison officer in a specific third country may make requests to a Member State that does have a liaison officer there. Finally, EU Member States are obliged to notify each other and the General Secretariat of the Council about the posting and duties of liaison officers by them as well of the national contact points.⁵⁷

Several provisions, especially those in Article 2, of this Council Decision are merely a description of already existing practices without any obligation for the EU Member States. Other provisions provide for sharing tasks, looking after the interests of other member States and requesting another Member State to use its posted liaisons. Especially as this can be perceived as a far-reaching form of co-operation, and even may be characterised as a first step to horizontal integration, as defined by van Reenen (1989). One could question if expecting such co-operation is realistic, especially looking at the current situation in the EU, where the notion of sovereignty of the Member States still strongly governs all JHA actions (Fijnaut, 2004).

Often, the Nordic police liaison co-operation is used as an example of successful and effective sharing of liaison officers.⁵⁸ However, this Nordic police co-operation has gradually evolved informally over the last 30 years, and should be viewed against the Nordic co-operation in general (Gammelgård, 1997). It reflects the history of the Nordic countries (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland), and the fact that these countries are closely related, not only geographically, but also culturally and socially. This situation is an exception in the EU, since not only do the law enforcement systems vary widely (Anderson, 2002), but their foundations, i.e., national cultures, do so as well (Hofstede, 1991; Sheptycki, 1999). It is, therefore, by no means evident that such close co-operation will easily emerge between any of the other EU Member States, if at all.

Concluding Remarks

While avoiding far reaching conclusions based on this limited research, some concluding remarks and observations can be made. The article started with the observation that the empirical picture of international police co-operation is still far from complete, and subsequently has attempted to fill some gaps. In describing the role of both Interpol and Europol in operational police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF, it was argued that Interpol plays an important role in this field, while simultaneously, it became clear that, as yet, Europol does not. To support direct bilateral co-operation EU Member States have stationed a large number of liaison officers in the RF. These play a key role in operational co-operation, managing a significant part of the law enforcement information flow between the EU and the RF. The extraordinary circumstances under which the co-operation with the law enforcement agencies in the RF takes place, make personal contacts and human assessment crucial for achieving results. In other words, between the EU Member States and the RF exists a stable status quo of police co-operation that can be qualified as predominantly bilateral in nature without any significant incentives for change at the moment.

EU instruments, designed to enhance and formalise police co-operation between the EU Member States and the RF, as well as co-ordinating and formalising EU Member States' efforts in posting liaisons in third countries, do exist. From closer examination of two of these EU regulatory instruments, however, the impression emerges that both are of little relevance for police co-operation between the EU and the RF. Obviously intended as macro-level instruments to enhance police co-operation on the meso- and micro-level, their design shows much political ambition, but insufficient understanding of police reality. One can wonder whether any meaningful interaction between EU bureaucrats and police actors in the field takes place.

If the EU has the ambition to formalise and co-ordinate the EU-RF police co-operation, a single EU-RF legal framework for police co-operation and information exchange, replacing the web of bilateral agreements, could be a first step to achieve this. Nonetheless, if this were the case, the question remains to what extent such ambition would be sensible and achievable.

The aim of this article is to contribute to our developing knowledge about operational police co-operation. Many aspects could, of course, benefit from further scrutiny. One question that remains to be addressed is how some core concepts regarding operational police co-operation should be defined? Shared definitions of these concepts could assist the structuring of empirical findings.

Future research could also focus on the increasing processes of formalisation and institutionalisation of international police co-operation in the EU. To what extent do the instruments of the Council of the European Union shape the reality of day-to-day operational police co-operation in the EU and with third countries? The relevance in researching these questions lies in the potential contribution to a better understanding of the dynamics of international police co-operation for practitioners and policy-makers in the EU as well as for academics. This is important, especially since in the contemporary debate, formalisation and institutionalisation are often seen as the answer, not only to the increasing problem of transnational organised crime and terrorism, but also to the fragmented law enforcement efforts in the EU.

Notes

- [1] This article draws on the authors findings gathered during his work as a police liaison in Moscow from 1999 to 2004. Information was gathered in numerous conversations with law enforcement actors involved in the police co-operation between the EU Member States and the Russian Federation. Facts and figures were last verified and updated in March 2005. The author would like to thank Monica den Boer for her comments on earlier versions of this article and all that have contributed to the research for this article.
- [2] The agreement has applied provisionally since 1997 (See the *Official Journal of the European Communities (OJ)* L 327, 28.11.1997) and came into force on 1 December 2000 (*OJ* L 283 09.11.2000).
- [3] Some argue though that technical assistance can also be seen as a mechanism for a country to gain influence in another country (e.g., Huggins, 1998).

- [4] Influence is exercised though by governments through their heads of NCB which have a vote in the General Assembly of Interpol. In practice (almost) no head of NCB votes here without instructions from the responsible political authorities for the police in his country (i.e., Minister of Justice and/or Minister of Interior). The fact that Interpol is not embedded in an intergovernmental structure has prompted criticism about its accountability, though this is a lengthy discussion and not relevant at this point.
- [5] Interpol *General Secretariat Activity report 2004*, p. 4. (<http://www.interpol.int>).
- [6] See Deflem (2002) pp. 124–132 for the early history of Interpol.
- [7] Interpol has for co-ordination purposes grouped its member countries geographically in five regions.
- [8] Interpol *General Secretariat Activity report 2002 and 2003*.
- [9] An overview of treaties and conventions in which Interpol is mentioned as a channel to send requests and information is available online at: <http://www.interpol.int/Public/ICPO/LegalMaterials/conventions/Default.asp>
- [10] Interpol *General Secretariat Activity report 2003* pp. 15–16.
- [11] Presidential Ukaz *Ob Uchastii Rossiyskoy Federatii v deyatelnosti Mezhdunarodnoy organizatsiy ugolovnoy politzii –Interpola* No. 1113, 30 June 1996, and RF Governmental decree *O Natsionalnom Tsentralnom Byuro Interpola* No. 1190, 14 October 1996.
- [12] See RF Governmental decree *O Natsionalnom Tsentralnom Byuro Interpola* No. 1190, 14 October 1996.
- [13] Total number of messages and cases as well as the percentage of “European cases” are based both on several conversations with officials from the NCB Moscow in the last years, and on extrapolation of recent data mentioned in a press release (*Sotrudniki Interpola v Rossii v etom godu podgotovili i osushestvili 15 ekstraditsiy iz-za rubezha b Rossiyu*. RIA Novosti, 14 September 2004).
- [14] Interview with Colonel Timur A. Lakhonin, Head of the NCB Moscow in *Parlamentskoy Gazete* (10 June 2004).
- [15] From field notes by the author made during this meeting.
- [16] <http://www.europol.eu.int/legal/agreements/Agreements/16191.pdf>
- [17] See fact sheet on Europol January 2004, available online at: <http://www.europol.eu.int>.
- [18] Council Act of 3 November 1998 laying down rules concerning the receipt of information by Europol from third parties (*OJ* 1999/C26/03) and Council Act of 12 March 1999 adopting the rules governing the transmission of personal data by Europol to third States and third bodies (*OJ* 1999 C88/01).
- [19] Council decision of 27 March 2000, *OJ* 2000 C106/01.
- [20] *Europol annual report* 2003, p. 18.
- [21] Europol press release 6 November 2003, available on the Europol website at: <http://www.europol.europa.eu>.
- [22] Most probably this contact point will be situated within the NCB Interpol (see MVD press briefing during the European Regional Interpol conference on 3 June 2004, available online at: <http://www.mvd.ru>). There are, however, some indications of a turf-war on this subject inside the MVD. Meanwhile, it seems that Europol for communication with the MVD (other than at Ministerial level) only possesses a telephone and fax number, not exactly knowing where these lead.
- [23] Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament *Area of Freedom, Security and Justice: Assessment of the Tampere Programme and Future Orientations* (COM (2004) 4002, 2 June 2004).
- [24] See, for instance, Choice of Europol chief ends year-long wrangle, *Financial Times*, 24 February 2005.
- [25] Interview with the head of the MVD international cooperation department, Boris Shtokolov published in *Rossiskoy Gazete* (22 January 2004).

- [26] For example, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia.
- [27] Represented Member States are: Austria, Belgium, Czech republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Denmark is represented in Moscow by the Nordic liaisons of Finland, Norway and Sweden, although on a daily basis the Norwegian liaison functions as the first point of contact for the Danish.
- [28] Non-EU Member States that have liaison officers stationed in the RF are Bulgaria (1), Canada (1), Israel (1), Japan (2), South Korea (1), Ukraine (1), US (6). In addition, there are 10 representatives from CIS countries incorporated in a co-ordination bureau inside the MVD, making a total of 23 non-EU foreign law enforcement representatives.
- [29] This table was compiled based on the information provided by the liaison officers that responded on a questionnaire held at the end of 2004. Total response was 74% (23 out of 31 liaisons responded). The actual numbers were cross-checked against open sources and authors personal observations since 1999. Regarding the exact numbers in the years 1997 and 2002, an inaccuracy could occur because of some missing data.
- [30] The four new Member States that have a liaison officer in the RF (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland) however had their liaison officer already present for several years.
- [31] In comparison, the MVD has four liaison officers posted in EU Member States: Germany, Spain, Poland and Finland. (Interview with the head of the MVD International cooperation department, Boris Shtokolov in *Rossiskoy Gazete* 22 January 2004). The FSB (Russian Security Service) has liaisons posted in Germany and Sweden. Some of the declared Russian intelligence officers of the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) posted in the EU Member States incidentally handle requests in criminal cases on behalf of the FSB, however, this does not seem to be substantial.
- [32] For a more extensive, and perhaps more European view on the daily work of liaison officers—that, however, does not differ much from the descriptions Nadelmann offers—see Bigo (1996), who discusses the rise of liaison officers in Europe since the 1970s.
- [33] An obvious example are the UK HM Customs & Excise Fiscal, Crime and Drug liaison officers that cover a broad range of law enforcement issues. See on this subject NCIS *International division Annual report 2000–2001*.
- [34] An interesting development can be seen in the task of the police attachés of the French *Service de Coopération Technique International de Police* (SCTIP), a department that, since its establishment in 1961, has been exclusively focused on technical police co-operation. This focus has shifted in the last decade because of “réalités du moment ou aux impératifs de sécurité”, and the activities of the SCTIP attachés nowadays include the exchange of information “dans un certain nombre de secteurs prioritaires pour la sécurité intérieure tels que le terrorisme, le trafic de drogue, l’immigration irrégulière, la criminalité organisée”. Available online at: http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/rubriques/c/c3_police_nationale/c3310_sctip/index_html (retrieved 30 December 2004).
- [35] This number is based on results of the questionnaire. The responding liaison officers (74%) together reported handling a total of 3,170 cases yearly, resulting in an average of 138 cases per liaison officer.
- [36] Most liaison officers are, for governance and accountability purposes, obliged to administer every new inquiry handled as a separate case. A simple case could entail nothing more than a simple one-time information exchange, and all activities in this case could take less than one hour’s work. A complex case could entail requests for (co-ordination of) dozens of investigative actions, followed by formal legal assistance requests. Such cases involve hundreds of messages and take numerous hours of work spread over several months, however, it still counts as one “case”. To avoid paperwork, sometimes small inquiries are not labelled as a “case” even though formally they should.

- [37] Council of Europe (2003) *Best Practice Survey No. 5: Cross border cooperation in the combating of organised crime*, p. 11.
- [38] See MVD Journal *Shchit I Mech* (16 October 2003, no. 41, p. 1).
- [39] Members are Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russia and Sweden. See <http://www.balticseataaskforce.dk>.
- [40] Reference is made here only to police co-operation, co-operation by customs and border guards is based on other bilateral and multilateral agreements.
- [41] These are: European Convention on extradition (1957); European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters (1959); European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (1977); and European Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the proceeds from Crime (1990).
- [42] See *Federalniy Zakon Ob Organakh Federalnoy Sluzhbi Bezopaznosti*, 3 April 1995, No. 40-FZ, last changed 1 December 1999.
- [43] The border guard has always been part of the former KGB, but was an independent agency between 1994 and 2003.
- [44] See Block, L. *De Noordelijke zijderoute; aanpak van drugshandel in de Russische Federatie* [*The Northern Silk route: combating drug trade in the Russian Federation*]. *Recherche magazine*, October 2003.
- [45] Russian criminal law makes a distinction between the operational and the formal investigative process, the latter strictly regulated by the Criminal Process Code and consisting of the formal evidence collection and formation of the case-file for the prosecution. The formal investigation is handled by so-called investigators which can be found either at the prosecution service or at the so called “investigative committees”, attached to either MVD, FSB or the SADC. Since executing a request for legal assistance mostly entails evidence collection, these should be handled formally as well.
- [46] There are some more criteria that determine the exact division in competence between the prosecution service and the investigative committees, however explaining these goes beyond the scope of this article.
- [47] See Block, L. *De Noordelijke zijderoute; aanpak van drugshandel in de Russische Federatie* [*The Northern Silk route: combating drug trade in the Russian Federation*]. *Recherche magazine*, October 2003.
- [48] For more insight in corruption in the law enforcement structures in the RF, see Shelley (1996), Vaksberg (1991) and Varese (2001). Recent and factual data in English can be found in numerous in-depth reports in *The Moscow Times*.
- [49] Some say that every police officer in the RF is corrupt and that only the degree to which differs. See Battlefield view of the war on drugs. *The Moscow Times*, 5 March 2005.
- [50] Widely known recent examples of this practice are the investigations against Mikhail Khodorkovsky and Yuliya Tymoshenko. It should be noted that the criminal cases against the targets could very well be solid, however the timing and the arbitrariness of launching the cases—which have often been prepared for years until they came of use—is certainly politically motivated.
- [51] Consider for instance the case of Zakayev who’s extradition to the RF was denied by both Denmark (2002) and the UK (2003), and specifically see the consecutive harsh comments made on these cases by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the RF (published online at: www.mid.ru).
- [52] OJ C 106/5 of 13 April 2000.
- [53] The action plan has been mentioned on several occasions as supporting the argument for JHA projects in the framework of the TACIS and FALCONE programmes, although this hardly qualifies as “action”. See the *TACIS National Indicative Program for Russia 2004–2006* adopted by the European Commission on 21 May 2003, and the *Report on the activity of the Falcone Programme, financial year 2000*, European Commission, 15 February 2001.

- [54] Speech of the Minister of the Interior, Finland, Ville Itälä during a seminar at the Centre of Strategic Research, Moscow, 24 January 2002.
- [55] 2003/170/JHA of 27 February 2003 (OJ L 67 of 12 March 2003).
- [56] 96/602/JHA of 14 October 1996 (OJ L 268 of 19 October 1996).
- [57] The Council General Secretariat possesses an overview of most Member States' national contact points for law enforcement liaison officers (listed in the Police Handbook 15732/04 ENFOPOL 119) but could not provide the author with an overview of Member States liaison officers in third countries, claiming that this list does exist, however, it is not a public document.
- [58] See, for instance: *EU Schengen catalogue, volume 4, Police Co-operation: Recommendations and Best Practices*, p. 16 (Council of the European Union, General Secretariat, June 2003).

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